



**For immediate release  
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## **DCR ASKS PUBLIC'S HELP IN TRACKING SEAGULLS FROM QUABBIN AND WACHUSETT RESERVOIRS**

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has begun a program to track the habits and flight patterns of seagulls near the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs, and is asking the public's help in reporting any sightings of tagged gulls.

With funding from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority's (MWRA) Water Supply Protection Trust, DCR staff members have begun catching and tagging seagulls around the reservoirs in an effort to track their feeding habits and daily whereabouts. That information will be used to help identify local food sources for the birds and determine the best way to try to prevent them from spending the night at the reservoirs.

From fall through spring, thousands of gulls spend the night sitting in the water at the reservoirs. For almost 20 years, DCR has used various techniques to scare the birds away from the MWRA intake pipes and prevent their droppings from polluting the water. While those techniques – which involve setting off loud noises near the gulls, for example – have proven effective, DCR is looking for a more ecological and efficient approach.

“The existing gull harassment program has worked well, but we can do more and do it more effectively,” said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. “Keeping the gulls away from the reservoirs will help the MWRA maintain the Quabbin and Wachusett as some of the highest-quality water sources in the nation.”

Together, the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs provide drinking water for 2.2 million people and 5,500 industrial users in eastern Massachusetts. The reservoirs contain one of the most abundant and high-quality water supplies in the world.

Ria Convery, spokeswoman for the MWRA, said her agency strongly supports DCR's efforts to track the patterns of gull behavior as a way to control that population.

“The MWRA is delighted that DCR is taking these steps to protect the waterway,” Convery said.

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To date, DCR employees have tagged more than 200 ring-billed, herring, and great black-back gulls. Each species has its own tag color, and each tag has an individual number. The tags are easily legible without binoculars. With help from the public, DCR has been able to record the whereabouts of many of the birds at various times during the day, week, and season. Sightings already have been received from central Massachusetts to Maine, as well as from the Canadian provinces of Manitoba and Newfoundland.

Anyone who sees a wing-tagged bird is asked to try to obtain the alpha-numeric combination on the tag (e.g., A57) and report it using the contact information below. Common places to find these wintering gull species are at landfills, parking lots (particularly those with fast-food establishments), and ball fields. The public is urged to keep a look out for any wing-tagged birds while birding, grocery shopping, or at the kids' soccer game.

DCR officials plan to use the information gathered from the program to make the agency's harassment program more efficient, and possibly eliminate food supplies that would encourage the gulls to move elsewhere.

"Mass Audubon is aware that the presence of large numbers of gulls on public water supplies poses potential health threats," said Taber Allison, Mass Audubon's vice president of conservation science and ecological management. "We support and have long supported DCR's efforts to identify and reduce the availability of local food sources that attract the gulls to central Massachusetts."

Anyone who sees a tagged gull is asked to notify DCR of the time and place the bird was sighted, and its tag color and number. Please contact Dan Clark at 508-792-7423, ext. 215 or [dan.clark@state.ma.us](mailto:dan.clark@state.ma.us). Reports on the project, when available, will be posted on the DCR website: [www.mass.gov/dcr](http://www.mass.gov/dcr).

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*The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, and dams, in addition to 278 bridges and miles of roadways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency's mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit [www.mass.gov/dcr](http://www.mass.gov/dcr). Contact us at [mass.parks@state.ma.us](mailto:mass.parks@state.ma.us).*